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Social Media & Teacher Professional Development

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Social media & teacher professional development

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Abstract: The idea of social media's existing application and future potential for professional development drives a growing subset of academic research. As we encourage preservice and inservice teachers to engage in these platforms to hone or refine their classroom practice, a number of questions emerge. How do we assess participation in these spaces? What uses in particular should we recommend? Further, the very notion of conducting research in these spaces also poses interesting questions. From methodologies to frameworks, commonly accepted practices help shape the future of the field. Lastly, the issue of privacy and policy poses perhaps the most significant area for attention. The intent of this panel discussion is generate conversation on how future research and application on social media usage and research might evolve over time.

Introduction

Social media has quickly and swiftly shifted the way we interact. From its use to influence national elections and political movements (Hannon, 2017) to social justice efforts rallying around hashtags such as #blacklivesmatter and #bringourgirlsback (Yang, 2016), we've seen the rise in popularity and, indeed, evolution in use. What initially began as a way for "(re)connecting with friends or sharing family photos and trending memes" (Dousay & Asino, 2017, p. 206) has matured to include a way for businesses to engage with customers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) and professionals to engage in professional development (Guidry & Pasquini, 2016). This latter affordance poses a fascinating question for the teacher educator and scholar; how does this emerging space shape our practice, what we promote to the next generation of teachers, and how we engage with inservice teachers and administrators? Dousay and Asino (2017) noted:

"Social media and emerging spaces engage and enable individuals to extend their personal learning networks in a variety of ways. Twitter chats occur regularly, professionally related Facebook groups are commonly utilized, and discussions between professionals are held via group text messaging on various mobile platforms" (p. 206).

Indeed, boyd (2015) marveled at this phenomenon, specifically the shift from discouraging and dismissing social media entirely to embracing its role in the digital world. Grosseck and Holotescu (2008) were among the first to see value in microblogging and Twitter as an educational tool. At the time of their analysis, the scholars noted that they were among the few active users incorporating social media in education. In particular, the Romanian scholars recommended social media for building classroom communities, collaborating, facilitating discussions, and even identifying references and resources. Fast forward a few short years later, and Forte, Humphreys, and Park (2012) found that teachers tend to be eager adopters of the social media platform, forming active professional learning communities (PLCs). It is within the idea of PLCs that specific notion of teacher professional development emerged. Specifically, popular media outlets, like Edutopia, and professional organizations, like the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), emerged as vocal proponents for Twitter chats to bring together educators and administrators for real time, just in time learning. Within a few more years, the State of Wyoming had approved professional development credit to teachers who engage in Twitter chats (Wyoming Department of Education, 2015).

This relatively rapid progression parallels evolving guidance in how we use and promote social media as teacher educators, particularly noting the measurement, issues, and ethical considerations that underlie our efforts and conversations. Seeking to better understand and explore this growing phenomenon, the educational technology journal *TechTrends* approved a special issue for publication in Spring 2017. This panel proposal brings together the special issue editors and specific scholars who contributed to this issue with particular interest to the teacher education community. Among the themes identified in the special issue, assessment, applied research, and policy issues emerge as topics of conversation for us to explore with the audience.

The following sections explore each of these areas and then lead into a brief abstract of each panelists' work on the topic. The intent of this panel discussion is to generate conversation on how future research and application on social media usage and research might evolve over time. We will open the discussion with a very brief introduction (5 minutes) and lead into each panelists' expertise (5-7 minutes each), providing opportunity for Q&A and discussion with audience participants in between each panelist. At the conclusion of the final panelist, we will invite an open dialogue on possible future research collaborations in any of the areas.

Assessment and use of Social Media in Professional Development

With respect to assessment, questions remain regarding how we assess participation in social media activities. This is where we might look to use cases for adoption or adapting to specific contexts. Tian Luo, Jamie Sickel and Li Cheng, employed a multiple case-study design approach to provide an in-depth understanding of how students participate and perceive their own learning in Twitter-supported live chat settings. Their article in the special issue was titled "Preservice teachers' participation and perceptions of Twitter live chats as personal learning networks." "Enriching Professional Learning Networks: A Framework for Identification, Reflection, and Intention," by Daniel G. Krutka, Jeffrey P. Carpenter and Torrey Trust, argued that social media services can mediate professional engagements with a wide variety of people, spaces and tools that might not otherwise be available.

Applied Research on Social Media and Professional Development

When researching an emerging or relatively new phenomenon, choosing an appropriate research method often challenges researchers. Spencer P. Greenhalgh and Matthew J. Koehler focused their research on instances where Twitter has made just-in-time learning possible. The special issue included their article, "28 Days Later: Twitter Hashtags as "Just in Time" Teacher Professional Development," which used digital research methods to examine the use of an educational hashtag to create a temporary affinity space supporting French teachers preparing to discuss terrorist attacks in their classes. In more recent research around social media, Greenhalgh and colleagues have continued their exploration of innovative, digital research methods and their use of these methods to highlight diverse examples of teacher-focused affinity spaces on Twitter.

Policy, Social Media and Professional Development

Luke Rodesiler, reminded us that regardless of the capacity and capability social media has in supporting teachers' professional development, there are at times policies that dictate to varying degrees how teachers, especially at the K-12 level can use a district's network and related technologies. In "Local Social Media Policies Governing Teachers' Professionally Oriented Participation Online: A Content Analysis," the author conducted an ethnographic content analysis to build an understanding of policies that stand to guide teachers' professionally oriented participation online. In "Information Policy and Social Media: Accept or Decline," Dian Dian Walster uses an autoethnography method to examine how intersections between information policy and social media affect

professional ethics and instructional decision making as considered through the lens of professional development and continuing education.

The Panelists

Preservice teachers' participation and perceptions of Twitter live chats as personal learning networks

Tian Luo, Jamie Sickel, Li Cheng

This study presents two cases in which undergraduates were introduced to Twitter in their teacher preparation program as a means of developing a personal learning network. Twitter live chats are synchronous discussions that allow education stakeholders to discuss issues and share resources, engaging on potentially a global scale via the social networking platform. This study examines how students participated in these live chats, perceived benefits and challenges and how prior experience and preconceived perceptions of Twitter influenced the live chat experience and intentions for continued participation. Pre-activity reflections, student tweets and post-activity reflections were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. While familiarity with Twitter varied, no participants had previously participated in a professional Twitter live chat; the majority of participants indicated a positive perception and intentions to continue participating in Twitter live chats. Plans for introducing, scaffolding and reflecting on initial Twitter live chat experiences are detailed and considerations and implications are discussed.

Enriching professional learning networks: A framework for identification, reflection, and intention

Daniel G. Krutka, Jeffrey Paul Carpenter, & Torrey Trust

Many educators in the 21st century utilize social media platforms to enrich professional learning networks (PLNs). PLNs are uniquely personalized networks that can support participatory and continuous learning. Social media services can mediate professional engagements with a wide variety of people, spaces and tools that might not otherwise be available. Teachers who once might have had access to only a handful of colleagues can now employ Facebook, Twitter and other mediums to learn from peers across the globe at any time. However, educators face numerous challenges building and enhancing their PLNs for professional growth. To support educators in the development of their PLNs, we present a framework for PLN enrichment. Rooted in our research and experiences with PLNs, this flexible framework is designed to help educators reflect upon how they might continuously improve their PLN experiences and outcomes.

Using community features to distinguish between regional educational Twitter hashtags

Spencer P. Greenhalgh

The purpose of this study is to describe and classify Regional Educational Twitter Hashtags (RETHs) that have been created to support teacher professional learning on Twitter. These hashtags can be conceived of as spaces with community features, and because they are associated with different social and geographical contexts, these features are likely to differ from hashtag to hashtag. Previous research suggests that online communities can be distinguished in terms of features such as communication, participants, and activity. This study is a quantitative content analysis of approximately 1.6 million tweets from 68 different RETHs. I use Twitter trace data to determine what community features related to communication, participants, and activity are present in these RETHs and then use principal components analysis (PCA) to generate dimensions that summarize the patterns of difference between these hashtags.

Local social media policies governing teachers' professionally oriented participation online: A content analysis

Luke Rodesiler

In light of recent scholarship about teachers leveraging social media to support their continuing professional development, this study featured an investigation of school board policies governing teachers' use of social media. Focusing on 30 traditional public school systems within a 10-county region in the Midwestern United States, the author collected social media policies and conducted an ethnographic content analysis to build an understanding of the policies that stand to guide teachers' professionally oriented participation online. Of the 30 public school districts included in the study, 19 districts published policies specific to teachers' use of social media. The study's findings address districts' efforts to craft policies that define social media, reiterate relevant pre-existing policies, and support educational uses of social media. The study holds implications for teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers.

Information Policy and Social Media: Accept or Decline

Dian Walster

How can teachers and teacher educators successfully negotiate the instructional and ethical decisions necessary to use social media and attend to privacy and security issues? Three areas are critical to consider in choosing and using social media for either professional use or as an instructional tool:

1. The formal information policies of social media platforms. In other words what do social media platforms do with the information you provide them by using their service? What are the privacy and security implications both for yourselves and your students?
2. The informal information policies which you, your colleagues and your students have. In other words we all have standards or rules of thumb that we apply when deciding whether or not to communicate in a certain way or use a particular web resource. Or we may have religious beliefs, family requirements or personal predilections that influence how and why we communicate using a social media platform.
3. The professional ethics that guide us in all instructional and professional decisions we make. How do these ethics intersect with formal information policies and informal information decision making for teaching and learning?

These are the starting points for conversations about how to design and deliver instruction using social media that addresses professional ethics considerations and takes into account formal and informal information policies.

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